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Special Intelligence Memorandum

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Iraq: Saddam Appoints Himself Prime Minister

Saddam's cabinet shuffle highlights the serious economic pressures confronting him--and his apparent need to address them directly. The changes may presage domestic initiatives against crime or inflation, but do not portend any major changes in foreign policy.

Baghdad announced on 29 May that Saddam had assumed the post of Prime Minister, replacing Ahmad Husayn Khudayir al-Samarra'i in the fourth change of premiers since the Gulf war. Saddam also appointed two members of the ruling Revolution Command Council (RCC)--Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan al-Jizrawi and Presidential Advisor Muhammad Hamzah al-Zubaydi--to Deputy Prime Minister posts alongside Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz. A public statement attributed the changes to "the circumstances of the unjust blockade and the need for exceptional interest in economic issues."

Despite their dramatic appearance--Saddam had never directly assumed a cabinet position since becoming President--these measures are unlikely to signal major policy shifts.

- No minister was expelled from the cabinet--even former Prime Minister Khudayir retains his portfolio as Finance Minister.
- An official statement following Aziz' 29 May report to Saddam and the RCC on the May UN sanctions review lauded progress in the Security Council, suggesting Saddam's endorsement of Aziz' diplomatic strategy.

Saddam's measures are part of an urgent effort to restore an image of effective, paternal leadership amid quickly worsening economic conditions--including the dinar's recent fall to an alltime low of 510 to the dollar.

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59050329, #1, Saddam Hussein

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- o During his first cabinet meeting as Prime Minister on 30 May, Saddam admonished his ministers to take responsibility for solving Iraq's problems and not to "wait for good news" concerning the embargo, according to press reports.
- o Saddam also told the cabinet that despite his high position, he was "aware of the minor details" and understood the hardships of the average Iraqi.

Saddam also may use his new position to take a more visible role in the daily workings of government, especially to launch high-profile initiatives against crime and inflation. Like his previous programs--such as ordering summary executions of money changers--these initiatives will probably appear decisive but are likely to be ineffective or even backfire.

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